

# A Guide to Stimulating Seminars

Students are responsible for controlling their own discussion. The teacher, who traditionally leads discussion in the classroom, acts as little as possible. Perhaps the teacher's only function is to observe and evaluate, although he/she might begin or shift a discussion when necessary. Students take responsibility for the discussion. Students get it rolling, focus it, and direct it. All students participate, but not in a competitive manner. In all respects the discussions during seminar are a team effort, even though opinions are bound to differ.

A successful discussion is one which:

- 1. Everyone participates. Encourage participation.**  
(The loud do not dominate, the shy should be encourage to contribute)
- 2. Comments are listened to, understood, and respected.**  
(One speaker at a time, all focus on the speaker...no distractions)
- 3. Students are sincere, animated, and helpful**
- 4. There is a clear sense of direction as students attempt to resolve questions and issues before moving on to new ones**
- 5. Students support their ideas with evidence** (examples and quotations).  
**Students should be well prepared for seminar and able to refer to related written assignment.**
- 6. Students take risks and dig for insights and deeper meaning**
- 7. Students recognize when the process is breaking down and make adjustments to get all members focused on the task.**

Discussion skills are important. Everyone must be aware of how to get discussion moving and how to keep it interesting. Here are a few ways you may contribute to seminar.

Organize, lead	summarize, clarify a point	ask a question
Give an opinion	make a helpful suggestion	ask for clarification
Argue a point	make a text reference	ask for a reference
Fill in a gap	shift the discussion	ask for participation

## Table 1: A Guide to Evaluation of Seminars

Teacher joins in the seminar circle and plays the role of passive facilitator, listens and evaluates. Student's names are on a sheet in front of the teacher, the following tallies are marked near the student's name during discussion:

- ⊕ For comments that offer synthesis, decisive in advancing discussion
  - +
  - !
  - ?
  - O
  -
- For a higher level thought, or supporting comment with evidence  
General comments or participation  
Posing a question to the group or an individual student  
For opening the discussion to a person who is not participating  
Negative comments and disrespect

Graded evaluation is based on student preparation, generally a written assignment related to the seminar topic, and the accumulation of the above marks. Three points are assigned for a “⊕,” two points are assigned to a “+,” one point to the other marks, and minus two points for a “-.”

